

Minutes of January Meeting of Allentown EAC

A meeting of the Allentown EAC was held on January 12, 2015 starting at 5:15 p.m. in the 3rd floor conference room at City Hall.

EAC Members Present: Tinku Khanwalkar, Scott Burnet, Randy Fey, Joe Hoffman
(reappointment pending)

Non-EAC Members Present: Lee Vedder, Rick Holtzman, Karen El Chaar, Claudia Steckel, Vicky Kistler, Joyce Marin

Old Business

- Tinku Khanwalkar reviewed the EAC vision for 2015 which is to partner effectively with the City and others and make a difference with respect to one or more environmental initiatives. Tinku suggested that the discussion at the meeting be focused on picking the appropriate initiative for 2015 and then discuss action items in furtherance of that initiative. Tinku then requested each person present at the meeting to suggest an initiative and explain why that would be the best initiative for 2015.
 - Vicky Kistler presented first, describing in detail two successful, but somewhat conflicting programs (Rodale organic vs. Seed Farm non-organic) that are underway to increase community gardens and urban farming. A business plan and model have been developed to work with Rodale Institute on organic vertical urban farming as well as with Community Action Committee. Several entities are already engaged, including the DCED, Allentown Health Department, and Department of Parks and Recreation. Christy Alford is the primary contact on this initiative. With all the momentum already building on this initiative, it appeared to be a good one for the Allentown EAC to also become engaged.
 - Lee Vedder spoke next and agreed that building community gardens is an excellent initiative because it builds community. Very few other environmental initiatives bring communities together as well as this type of initiative would.
 - Claudia Steckel spoke next. Claudia questioned whether the EAC should limit itself to just one or two initiatives. Tinku explained that the EAC should be careful not to spread itself too thin as we want to undertake a truly successful initiative this year to effectively address the perception that the Allentown EAC doesn't make things happen. Claudia then suggested that the Allentown EAC consider an initiative to reduce bird strikes. This appears particularly appropriate because Allentown is a Bird Town and a member of the Lehigh Valley Bird Town Coalition. She also noted that we have a tremendous resource in Dr. Dan Klem, an ornithologist at Muhlenberg College and renowned expert on bird strikes.

- Joyce Marin spoke next and favored the urban gardening initiative as it would fit well with the regional plan.
- Randy Fey spoke next and suggested that the Allentown EAC should limit itself to providing advice and not be involved in any initiatives. Tinku agreed that the EAC's role is primarily advisory but that our advice can include research and other efforts to support initiatives that we agree we want to support.
- Joe Hoffman was asked his views on this as he has served on other EACs. Joe noted that other EACs do provide advice but also engage in advocacy, education and implementation actions.
- Vicky Kistler suggested that letters of support from the EAC could be very helpful. The problem has been that the EAC is not aware of where its support or advice is needed ahead of time and is, therefore, unable to provide it effectively.
- Tinku Khanwalkar then moved to have Joe Hoffman be the EAC liaison to the Allentown Parks and Recreation Department, to build close relationships with them and keep us informed of their activities so that we can have sufficient advance notice to more effectively provide advice or support. The motion was seconded by Scott Burnet and **APPROVED**.
- Tinku Khanwalkar then moved for Scott Burnet to similarly be EAC liaison to Friends of the Allentown Parks. The motion was seconded by Randy Fey and **APPROVED**.
- Tinku Khanwalkar then noted that Rick Niesenbaum is already slated to be appointed to the Allentown Planning Commission and asked whether there are other City bureaus to which the EAC should appoint a liaison. Randy Fey suggested that he could also be more active with the Planning Commission. Vicky Kistler noted that Allentown Public Works is another important bureau to which the EAC should appoint a liaison. Tinku moved to have Randy Fey as the EAC liaison to the Allentown Public Works Department. The motion was seconded by Scot Burnet and **APPROVED**.
- Joyce suggested that she can attend future EAC meetings to keep the EAC informed of regional discussions.
- Scott Burnet spoke in favor of the Bird Strike Prevention Initiative and presented his findings in a well-detailed document covering all aspects of the issue.

- In light of these discussions, Tinku suggested that the EAC could primarily focus on building relationships in 2015 and as a secondary effort, could do some research and possibly hold education events on the initiatives that had previously been discussed. Joe Hoffman agreed to lead the effort on stormwater, with Tinku to help him; Scott agreed to lead the effort on bird strikes, with Claudia to help him, Tinku noted that Rich Niesenbaum had already expressed an interest in urban gardening and Joyce said she would help him, and Tinku agreed to lead the effort on native plants, with Claudia to help her.
- There was also a discussion of the need for additional education of Parks and Recreation employees. Joe Hoffman, as the liaison for the Parks and Recreation Department, will work with them on the best way to meet this need.

The meeting was duly adjourned at 7:35 p.m.